

National Seminar on "BIRD ECOLOGY AND CONSERVATION"
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Please Register by 30th September, 2005.

Newsletter for

Birdwatchers



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A Note from the Publisher

Dear fellow birdwatchers,

**Impasse at Kaggaladu**

In their article on Kaggaladu Painted Storks' colony, Chandrashekar and Mahalingappa, have made attempts to understand the key problems hurting the painted storks and grey herons. They have also looked at the circumstantial evidences that are contributing to their frustration and have briefly focused on the options available for the revival of the wetlands and consequently, the nesting colony at their village.

Whatever has happened to the Kaggaladu painted stork colony on the wetland and waterfowl conservation front, there will be many vexing moral questions to of waterfowl lovers to ponder and grieve. It will be some kind of redemption for the villagers and relief for the bird lovers; if the storks indeed return to Kaggaladu, which has remained desolate for the past four years. Now that a new channel has been dug up last year from the Hemavathy reservoir up to Sira tank and that bountiful monsoon showers have already filled up many tanks and reservoirs in the area, the optimism that painted storks will return to Kaggaladu, by December 2005, has revived.

In a previous issue, we had discussed the problems distressing the painted stork colony at Veerapura. The revival hopes are probably chimerical and yet one has to conclude that these are the only wiser options close at hand. If significant efforts are not made to revive the wetlands and conserve our lakes, there is every reason to fear that the storks would avoid Kaggaladu and Veerapura, on a permanent basis. Our earnest plea to the authorities is that they are free to take up any option, in a manner neither vitiated by a politically prejudiced decision nor an ecologically imprudent course of action.

Fieldfare's Secret Arsenal !

Sighting a rare bird has been the dream of most birders. It became a reality for Joshua, Soni, Nischal and Pankaj Joshi, when they sighted a pair of Fieldfares (*Turdus pilaris*), in a degraded open scrub forest patch near Firozpora village, in north Gujarat. Incidentally, this is the second sighting of this bird in India. Earlier, this bird had been sighted only once in India, near Saharanpur, U.P.

Fieldfare belongs to the Thrush family, breeds from Greenland to Siberia, northern Britain, eastern France, vagrant in Canada and northeastern United States, winters in Mediterranean, China, northern Iran, and Turkistan. In India, it is reportedly an accidental species with no more than two reported sightings till date. Fieldfares are gregarious, found in large flocks in winter, and in summer

nest in loose colonies, building mud-lined, cup-shaped nests in tree forks.

Although most of the thrush family members are eminent songsters, fieldfare has developed a secret arsenal for its phenomenal success. Barely, the hobby of birdwatching, has witnessed a champion bird, as determined and invincible as the fieldfare, when it comes to defending its nest from predators. Its lifecycle pivots around its impeccable will and uncommon gut.

In their admirable quest to safeguard their nesting colonies, they collectively defecate and bombard a predator such as a crow or a raven, with copious quantities of droppings. The crow finds the intense bombardment to its discomfort and beats a hasty retreat, rather than making headway towards the fieldfare nesting colony.

In this manner, the fieldfares are able to defend their nesting colonies and operate with their secret arsenal, which is virtually unparalleled in the avian world. The precise aerial bombardment bewilders the predator; which has no alternative but to withdraw to a safe distance to cleanup its messy feathers.

Perhaps, Joshua and fellow birders didn't peek too close to the fieldfares, or more probably, the fieldfares weren't in a mood to defend their wintering grounds. Thank goodness, the birders at Firozpora were past the worst of the fieldfares' target practice sessions!

Thanking you,

Yours in bird conservation

S. Sridhar

Publisher, NLBW



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Painted Storks Abandon Kaggaladu Colony

M. CHANDRASHEKAR and K.T. MAHALINGAPPA, Kaggaladu Village, Sira-Changavara Road, Sira Taluk, Tumkur District. Pin 572 137

Painted storks and grey herons are determinedly skipping their breeding activities at Kaggaladu for the past four years and now it is more or less certain that they have abandoned this colony, for good. Around 600 painted storks and 150 grey herons used to build their nests on the tamarind trees in the middle of the village, between 1995 and 2001. Since 2002, the nesting activities have come to a complete standstill. Only once in September-October 2002, a flock of 30 painted storks, arrived for an overnight's stay and left the colony by 10 am, the next day. Just as the rains have failed for three successive years sinking the entire Sira taluk into depths of despair, the painted storks and grey herons have also failed to make their appearance at this colony. This has signaled deep problems ahead for the storks, herons and other wetland dependents.

As the permanent residents of this village, we are quite concerned about the prolonged absence of the storks. What is clear is that the wetlands frequented by the storks and herons have remained mostly dry in the intervening years, due to failure of monsoon in this part of the state. But what is less clear is how can the curtains fall on this nesting colony all of a sudden, leaving one of the more serious questions partially answered? We had expected the nesting activities to continue, at least, on a marginal scale.

Fishermen of Ananthapur District, Andhra Pradesh, had established fishponds on the banks of river Penna, which is contiguous with the River Vedavathy on the Karnataka side. When the fishponds were launched, the painted storks were quick to discover the presence of fish in abundance in these ponds. On the Karnataka side, the Rangaiahana Durga irrigation dam stores copious quantities of water and licensed fishermen are allowed to rear their fish. The Hagirai River from Harappanahalli to Koodlagi replenishes the Molakambur, Bhyrapura and Chikkakare tanks. These tanks

have the capacity to retain water up to February. In many tanks, fishermen were guarding the ponds during the day, but the storks began raiding the fishponds during the night, and caused logical loss of revenue to the fishermen. Fishermen of Pangiganahalli tank, which is near Kaggaladu, were reluctant to share their fish with the painted storks, and were threatening to shoot them down. But the timely intervention of Forest officials who distributed pamphlets among the rural populace, gave a reprieve to the storks, when they were nesting between 1995 and 2001. The Penna fishponds were radially located closer to the painted stork colonies at Veerapura, Pedullapalle, Repalle and Bedusapalle, which were surveyed by Koka Mruthumjaya Rao (NLBW Vol 45, 2), all of which are situated in Ananthapur district. Due to repetitive droughts, the river Penna has become extremely seasonal. As a result, fishermen deemed the fishponds not commercially viable and began to close down, in stages some three to four years ago. The closure of fishponds on the banks of the Penna river has in consequence forced the storks to abandon the breeding colonies listed above and at Kaggaladu, which is about 100 Kms., from Veerapura as the stork flies. This explanation appears credible, given the recent fiasco and debacle on the inland-fisheries front, in Andhra and Karnataka. One can no longer pretend that these two issues are non-concomitant. The storks are probably gifted with some innate faculties to discern the quantum of fish available, around the colonies and make calibrated decisions, in their nest-site selections. Thus, there might be some spillover from Veerapura and Kaggaladu colonies and the storks might be on the throes of establishing other colonies or making a beeline to the existing colonies.

Earlier, the painted storks were also nesting at the nearby Madakanahalli, which was deserted some years ago after a

poaching incident. Another nearby colony at Narayanapura was active for about thirty years, but was also deserted some 15 years ago. Previously the farmers of Kaggaladu were growing paddy, but due to acute water shortage, they are now growing groundnut, toordal, jowar, and ragi. Occasionally sunflower is grown during the monsoon. Most of the borewells are dry and only a few open wells retain some water worth mentioning, during the rainy season. The tanks at Kaggaladu, Sira, Kalkote, Lakshmisagara, Chikkasamudra, Goudagere have remained mostly dry in the intervening three years, limiting the scope of agriculture to a small number of farms, adjacent to these tanks. The river Vedavathi, which was feeding these tanks, has lost much of its glorious past and has decidedly become a seasonal river. The traditional fishermen, who were taking the tanks on lease for stocking and rearing fish, had to give up their profession, when the tanks began drying up within three to four months after the rains.

The government of Karnataka has drawn several ambitious plans to revive the irrigation potentials of the state. Therefore, it is worth examining some viable options to revive the painted stork colony at Kaggaladu, which will also benefit the farming community of Sira Taluk. Four alternate options are proposed by us:-

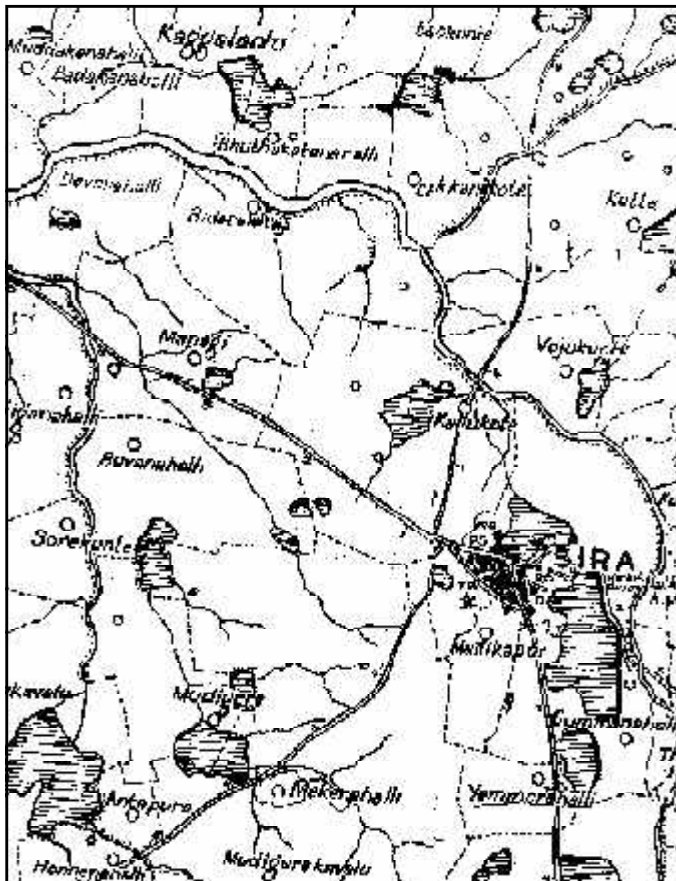
First Option : A channel has been finally completed last year to bring the Hemavathy river water to Tumkur city as well as Sira, which is about 7 kms from Kaggaladu. This

has materialised despite a plethora of problems that had cropped up creating a smoke screen on the project. Water from Hemavathy River was allowed to flow through a vent constructed at Patravathalli in Gubbi taluk and run along the natural course of the river Swarnamukhi to the Kallambella tank. Water from the Kallambella tank was in turn allowed to flow along the river bed to the Sira tank. A record downpour in the catchment area in July 2005, has brought copious quantities of water to the Hemavathy reservoir, which was filled to its brim. For the first time in 13 years, the crest gates of this reservoir have been opened up. Hopefully, the overflowing waters will be diverted along Suvarnamukhi riverbed to fill up Sira tank, which is about a kilometer away from Kaggaladu. The presence of water at Sira and Kallambella tanks and the continued flow of water along the river Suvarnamukhi, is likely to entice the painted storks to the colony at Kaggaladu. This is the cheapest option, since the Hemavathy river water had reached the Sira tank, via the new vent at Patravathalli for the first time in 2004.

Second Option : A check dam has already been constructed at Gajmaranahalli. The overflowing waters can be diverted by a feeder channel to Basndakunte tank, via Chikkankote village. From Bandankunte tank, the overflowing water will reach Kaggaladu tank through the natural drainage route.

Third Option : Water from the Gajmaranahalli check dam, will reach Kalloddu, where a dilapidated check dam exists between Kaggaladu and Bhutakatanahalli villages. At present overflowing waters are being diverted to the Devarahalli tank. We feel that the existing check dam should be refurbished or a new check dam constructed, at the Anjeneya temple area, using the stones from the dilapidated check dam. The waterholding capacity of the check dam has to be increased by deepening the dam. This is also a simple and cost effective option according to us. At the Gajmaranahalli Kudulu Sangama, the Siddarabetta tributary joins the river Suvarnamukhi, which in turn joins the river Vedavathi near Kudala halli, at Hiriur Taluk. The existing check dam at Gajmaranahalli, can be filled up by the overflow of Sira main tank. Fish can also be stocked exclusively for the painted storks at this check dam.

Fourth Option : Yet another feeder channel can be initiated from Tumkur bound Hemavathy main canal, to feed the Magodu and Madaluru tanks, which are fairly big. Here also no pumping is required. Water flows through the existing nala beds. The regular flow of water in the nalas will help in the recharge of the ground water level and consequently the revival of bore wells and some open wells which are defunct at present. A stretch of nearly forty kilometers from Dharmapura to Sira, including Kaggaladu could see a rise in the groundwater levels. In addition, the speedy implementation of Scheme 'B' of Upper Bhadra Project, is expected to make available 19 Mcft of water to Tumkur and two other districts of Karnataka. We hope that the authorities will take up one of the above options or any other option which they deem fit; not only to revive the painted stork colony at Kaggaladu but also to give a fresh breather to the farming community of the area.





Birds on Harkidun trek route (Sankri-Taluka-Khabugad): Garhwal Himalayas

ARUN P. SINGH, Scientist - D, Entomology Division, Forest Research Institute,
P.O. New Forest, Dehradun, Uttarakhand - 248 006
E-mail: singhap@icfre.org; arunpsinghranote@yahoo.com

A 20 km stretch was trekked (7-8 May'2005) from Sankri to Khabugad, which is three kilometers before Osla, or 15 kms ahead of 'Harkidun', in the Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand state. This stretch of forest is located below the 'Kedarkantha' peak (3,813m) on its north, facing slopes along the 'Supin' river. The forest here is high and dense mixed moist temperate vegetation (1,950-2,250m) having large sized, old grown trees of oak, cedar, spruce, silver, fir, blue and chir pines along with maple, dwarf bamboo, etc.

In all 72 bird species were recorded in two days. Of particular interest were fairly large number of Bullfinches: Brown Bullfinches (20+ at 5 locations) and/along with Red-headed Bullfinches (8+) feeding on seeds of a broad leaved tree (Chamkharik, *Carpinus viminea*, Wall) high up in the canopy. Brown Dipper was quite common on the torrents of Supin river, as 20+ individuals (many juveniles) were recorded in a two km river stretch. Three Speckled Wood Pigeons were observed in flight at a relatively close distance. In the dense bushy undergrowth, Indian Blue Robin was observed on three locations close to water. Two were found feeding and one was seen actively singing. Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler was the most common warbler found in the scrub, rendering its melodious song "You mixed it so quick - - - - he'll beat you!" (as described by Hugh Whistler in his book "Popular Handbook of Indian Birds, 1935) along the forest edges and slopes. Tickell's leaf, Western Crowned, Whistler's and Grey-hooded Warblers were also recorded during the trek.

Spotted Nutcracker was common near Sankri and at least six were noticed flying and feeding on cones in the pine patches along the road. Another highlight of the trek was

the Collared Falconet, which was noticed flying overhead near Sankri village. Other raptors included the Asian-barred owl, Mountain Hawk Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Common Kestrel, Himalayan Griffon, and an unidentified Accipiter. A pair of Koklass pheasants were heard in the morning at Taluka; Chukar and Black Francolin near Sankri and Kalij between Sankri and Naitwar.

Another memorable sighting was that of a Mountain Scops Owl (a small dark brown owl having ear-tufts), which was being chased by a flock of White-throated Laughing thrushes. Commonest birds sighted all along the trek were Large-billed Crow, Ultramarine and Grey-headed Canary Flycatchers, Oriental Turtle Dove, Blue Whistling Thrush, Long-tailed Minivet and Plumbeous Water Redstart.

In addition, a large party of Chestnut-tailed Minla (25+); White-browed Shrike Babbler (2 calling); Himalayan, Rufous-bellied and Scaly-bellied Woodpeckers collecting nesting materials, Pink-browed Rosefinch, Variegated Laughing Thrush, Whiskered Yuhina, Eurasian Jay, Streaked Laughing Thrush, Fire-breasted Flowerpecker, Verditer flycatcher, Spotted Forktail, Blue-capped Rock Thrush, and Grey-winged Blackbird were also recorded during the trek. Surprisingly, the Hill Partridge could not be recorded.

Mr. D. S. Rana, the wildlife guard of Gobind Wildlife Sanctuary, posted at Naitwar, informed me of many sightings of the Cheer Pheasant on the dry rocky slopes during winter on the other side of Supin river and the presence of Himalayan Monal on the higher reaches of Kedarkantha.

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Shelducks and Sandpipers tormented by weekend poachers at the Hesarghatta Lake

S. SHREYAS and R. S. HARAVE, Institute for Natural Resources Conservation, Education, Research and Training, No 10, Sirur Park 'B' Street, Seshadripuram, Bangalore 560 020
Email: Shreyas.navbarath@gmail.com, harave@vsnl.net

This is a narrative about the eerie weekend misdemeanors of two BPO employees at the Hesarghatta Lake, and our spontaneous efforts to forestall their escapades.

In winter, hundreds of waterfowl visit the Hesarghatta Lake, on the outskirts of Bangalore. One can watch batches of waders dipping their hungry beaks in the shallow lake margins to recoup their energies, before moving off to other favorite destinations. The derisive irony is that dozens of poachers also visit the lake around this time and with

meticulous planning and timing; hunt-down unwary waders from a distant world. Little will the waders be aware of the vicious plans to ambush them in the placid waters of the lake. Yet, most waders remain alert and prefer to carry on their activities in the safer zones. Nevertheless, some waders might be too engrossed in their feeding activities that they may momentarily throw caution to winds. Such a negligence, brought a sudden end to a common sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*), which was on its annual intercontinental tour.

One of us, Harave (RSH) drove to the lake on the afternoon of 27th February 2005 to watch the wintering waterfowl. He was dismayed to notice two poachers stalking a European white stork (*Ciconia ciconia*) with a firearm. But the wary stork kept retreating to safer zones, as and when the poachers advanced in its direction. At that juncture, a pair of Ruddy shelducks (*Tadorna ferruginea*), which were resting in an island of the lake, caught the poachers' attention. They could have decimated the shelducks, had the ducks not been alert and nimble-winged in avoiding the poachers. After escaping the threat to their existence, the shelducks circled the lake thrice, and moved out to explore safer pastures. The sequence of events was happening so fast at the other end of the vast lake that RSH could only watch the poachers' brazen actions through his binoculars and he could do little else to forestall them. He tried to contact the local police who were otherwise preoccupied with the Panchayat elections; underway at the Hesarghatta village. The day being a Sunday, he could neither establish contact with the officials of the forest department. Consequently, he alerted the first author Shreyas (SS) on his mobile, who rushed to the lake in his vehicle with an associate.

Though the waders were on their vigil's best, one of the poachers crept close to a flock of unsuspecting waders and fired his lethal weapon. At that very instant, the waders were seen wrestling with their wings in sheer desperation to avoid the hail of pellets. In the ensuing melee, an ungainly common sandpiper took a red-hot pellet on its left wing and was grievously hurt. The ordeal the sandpiper underwent is difficult to describe. It fell to the ground like a pebble, but recovered its nerves and determinedly tried to take-off. But, it rolled over the lake bed in agony with the dangling wing, and the jubilant poachers retrieved the injured sandpiper.

RSH was livid with rage and ran towards the poachers, poured out his anguish and admonished them for their wrongful hankering. His typical officer like posturing took the wit out of the poachers, who at once revealed their identities and

pleaded mercy, as they seldom wanted to get entangled in a legal problem that could curtail their employment prospects. But the vile act was overshadowed by the fact that, RSH had to simultaneously tackle three tasks. Firstly, he had to prevent the poachers from fleeing. Secondly, he had to garner support through his mobile and to keep SS informed about the exact location and the whereabouts of the poachers. And finally, he had to ensure that the injured bird's wing movements were restrained and medical attention provided to it at the earliest. Even in the throes of pain and suffering, the sandpiper remained listless in his caring hands. Its left scapular was completely shorn of flesh and the splintered bone was partially visible.

But for RSH's intervention, other waders would have also suffered casualties at the lake. The vastly expanded lake, with too many approach roads, had delayed SS zeroing on the culprits, who managed to flee on their motorbike, as RSH's attention was frequently getting diverted between the poachers, the injured sandpiper and his mobile.

The poaching activities are going on unchecked for years and life and death goes on at the lake, on a sizeable scale. The calls of the waders were fading like the sunset and another scorching day was coming to an end, as we reversed our respective vehicles and made 'u' turns to rush to the CUPA veterinary shelter, with the injured bird. At the shelter, we were assured by Chitra and Sudha Narayan of the best medical attention possible. They immediately referred the bird to their Wildlife Centre at Bannerghatta. At the centre, Salim opined that the sandpiper's survival prospects were bleak, in view of the fact that the injuries were life threatening. He also felt that the bird being a migrant, it might not survive the vagaries of nature and the sandpiper being a specialist feeder; it was not easy to put it on an appropriate diet. Therefore, the heartrending decision to euthanise the bird was taken. Thus the curtains were abruptly drawn over the sandpiper, bringing an end to its epic intercontinental migration.

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Dr. D.N. CHOUDHARY, Dept. of Zoology, P.N. College, Parsa (J.P. University), Saran - 841 219, Bihar

Breeding Behaviour and nesting of Indian Moorhen and Night Heron in the Laluchack Pond, Bhagalpur, Bihar

The Indian Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) is a slaty grey and brown marsh bird with conspicuous white under tail coverts. The forehead and the base of greenish bill is bright red, an identifying field mark (Ali, 1996).

It is commonly seen swimming or foraging in smaller and larger ponds / tanks enriched with aquatic vegetation, whereas Black crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) is a common resident with ashy grey above with glistening black back and white below.

It is gregarious, colonial breeding & nocturnal in habits (Ali & Ripley, 1987).

Laluchack pond at Bhagalpur (25°14'N and 86°58'E) is a good breeding ground for Indian moorhen as well as other water birds like white breasted waterhen, Bronze winged Jacana and Night Heron too. Laluchack pond is a small perennial pond having an area of about 0.5 sq. km, situated in about 2 km away to the east of Bhagalpur Railway Station.

It is highly infested with a variety of aquatic vegetation dominated by Eichornia, Typha & water lily. The rapid growth of Typha has divided the pond into many segments. Trapa cultivation is also done here in a small segment of this pond. In addition, a large Mango orchard is situated at the Southeast corner of the pond. Peepal (*Ficus religiosa*). Banyan (*F.bengalensis*) and Semal (*Salmalia malabarica*) etc., growing in this orchard provide good roosting sites for garden birds as well as waterfowl.

On 22nd July, 2004 at 7.00 hrs. I noticed the following activities of the birds around the pond :-

I observed the nest of a pair of Indian Moorhens through my binoculars (jingiang, 10x25 DOF), just behind a pakka house in a waterlogged, reed covered part at the southwest corner of the pond.

The nest was hardly 20 feet away from the house.

An Indian Moorhen was seen incubating and its partner was seen swimming and foraging nearby.

The incubating bird was seen uttering a high pitched kek kek, call or whenever her mate approached the nest.

As the nest was accessible from the house, I decided to take a closer look.

As I approached the nest, the incubating bird quietly left the nest.

I was fascinated to see the eggs and the architecture of the nest, which was a mass of aquatic plants placed on a small heap of dried or semi-dried Eichornia bed; a few inches above the water level.

The inner surface of the nest was lined mainly with Typha and Eichornia leaves. The leaves were nicely placed and the nest looked like a compact basket.

There were three eggs in the nest. They were dull whitish coloured with dark reddish brown patches all over.

I took a few photographs of the nest and left the spot in a jiffy.

During my presence both the parents were found restless and moving all around the nest uttering the "kek-kek" alarmed calls.

As soon as I left the spot, both the birds returned to inspect the nest and one of them resumed incubation.

Sometimes the incubating bird was found calling and rolling the eggs with jerking movements and rearranging them with its beak.

The birds were seen sharing the incubation duty by rotation.

According to the house owner, in addition to the Indian Moorhens, other birds such as White breasted waterhen and Bronze winged Jacana, also build their nests just adjacent to his house for the past several years. Perhaps they feel secured from predators. Other members of his

family also enjoy watching the activities of the nesting birds.

A heronry of black crowned Night Herons is located on the peepal and Banyan trees at the southeast corner of the pond.

These trees provide good nesting as well as roosting sites, especially for the night herons. Though pond herons, egrets and cormorants frequent the pond, they seldom breed here.

It is an exclusive night heron breeding colony. They are permanently residing here for the past several years and can be seen on the trees even during the daytime.

In all 83 Night Herons (including juveniles) and 32 nests were recorded between the last week of July and 1st week of August 2004.

Some were found incubating whilst others were seen carrying nesting materials and dumping them in the nest.

Though the nest building activity was observed throughout the day, much activity was recorded in the morning hours.

The incubating bird was found rearranging the nesting materials.

In view of these facts, the Laluchack pond may be considered as a good breeding site for these waterbirds. But at present, human habitations are coming up rapidly in the periphery of the pond, affecting the nesting activities. Considering all these issues, Mandar Nature Club, Bhagalpur, an organisation working for the conservation of nature & wildlife is doing its best to create awareness among the people about the need to protect the nesting birds.

Acknowledgement

I am thankful to Dr. T.K. Ghosh and Mr. Arbind Mishra (IBCN Coordinator, Bihar & Jharkhand) of Mandar Nature Club, Bhagalpur for their encouragement during my field work.

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Have you registered ?

**For the National Seminar on
Bird Ecology and
Conservation**

November 12 -13, Bangalore

If not please register by 30th September 2005

E mail: bird_seminar2005@yahoo.co.in



Bori with a difference

Dr. RAJIV SAXENA, MIG 853, Darpan Colony, Gwalior - 474 011(M.P.)



The name Bori in Madhya Pradesh is now synonymous with Bori Sanctuary, but the village Bori described by Scott (1977) in his famous book "Forest of the night" is not the same. His Bori is situated in the newly created Harda district, which was then a tehsil of Hoshangabad district. Bori Sanctuary is still a part of Hoshangabad (Map – 1).

Scott mentions that a bald peak called Suryadeo by the tribals is visible from the dak bungalow of Bori in the northern direction. The river Ganjal, he refers to at a few places in his book, now separates Harda from Hoshangabad. He visited three villages viz., Lodhidhana, Unchabari and Dhega situated at some distance from Bori, during the Holy festival in 1957.

He encountered wild animals such as tiger, leopard, wild boar, wild dog, sambar, chital, gaur, bear, nilgai, langur, jackal, hyena, blackbuck and chousingha.

His description of Bori of Harda is good enough to distinguish it from Bori Sanctuary of Hoshangabad; although a few years earlier, both Boris were a part of Hoshangabad. Bori Sanctuary can be reached by crossing the Tawa reservoir,

while to reach Bori of Scott's book, one has to detrain at Timarni or Harda station on Itarsi – Khandwa section of the Central Railway, from where it is 40 km away on the motorable road.

The latest comprehensive study of birds in any part of Madhya Pradesh is that of Rahmani (1992) on the birds of Karera Bustard Sanctuary. His paper not only provides comparative study of birds of north-west Madhya Pradesh, but also summarises earlier works done in this state. Therefore, it is not necessary to enlist all the references here. None of the earlier surveys covered this Bori region.

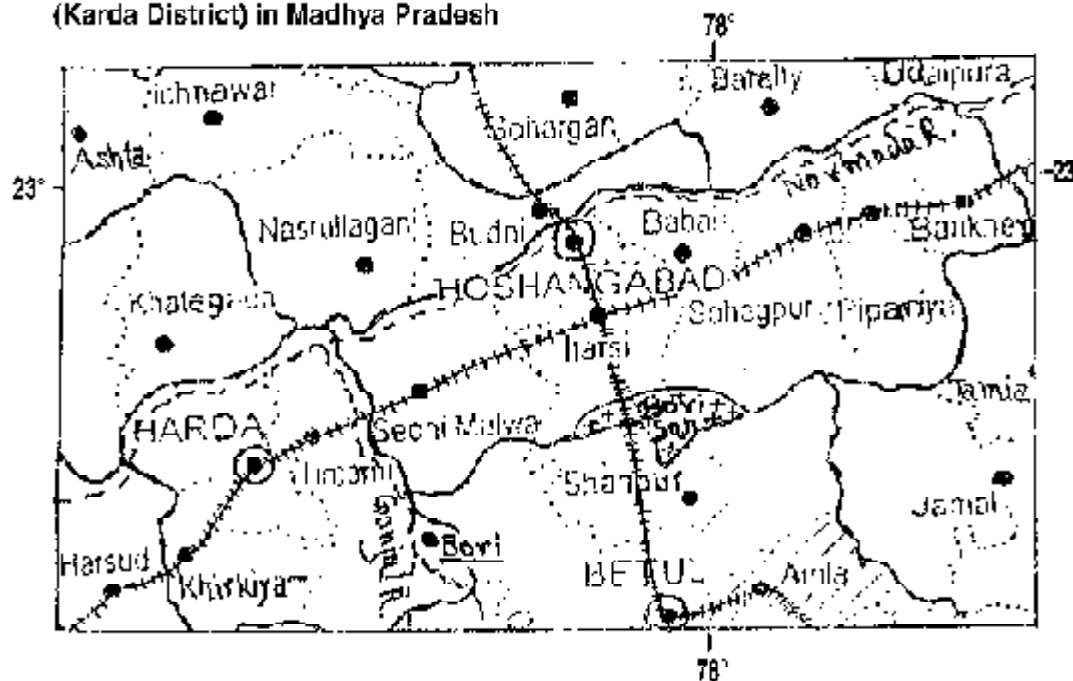
Scott (1977) visited Bori not only for big game hunting, but also for recording the birds of the region. These included peacock, spotted dove, imperial dove and grey jungle fowl.

In November, 2001, I visited Harda district on some urgent official work. I did not have much time, but I managed to visit Bori for two hours. Some elderly people there narrated how they used to capture peacocks alive wearing leopard skins, when shikar was legal in 1960's. They said that the peacocks who were usually wary of carnivores, were fascinated by "spotted cats" and came close to the man wearing leopard skins. Then, at an opportune moment the man wearing the leopard skin would throw nets at the peacocks to capture them alive. Now this practice has become redundant. They have also lost the practice of treating persons bitten by poisonous snakes, using jungle or domestic fowl. They used to cushion the cloacal opening of the fowl on the place where the snake had bitten. Then the fowl purportedly absorbed the snake poison and died in the process. Upto six fowl had to be sacrificed to get rid of the poison completely.

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Map 1: Showing aceri Sanctuary (Hoshangabad District) and anct Bori Village (Karda District) in Madhya Pradesh





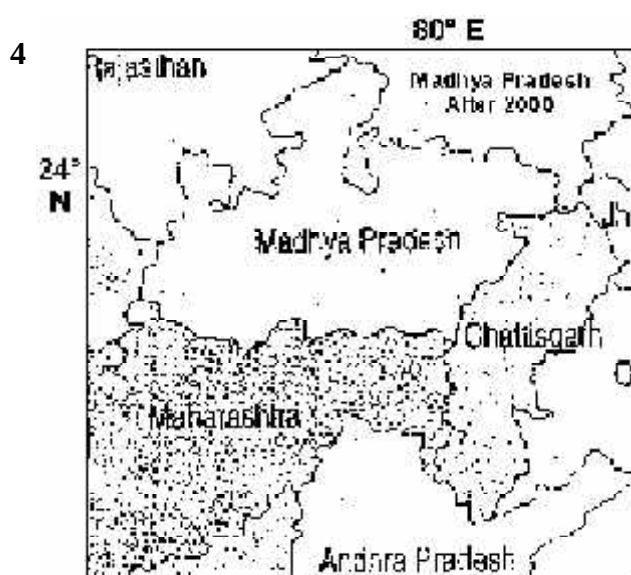
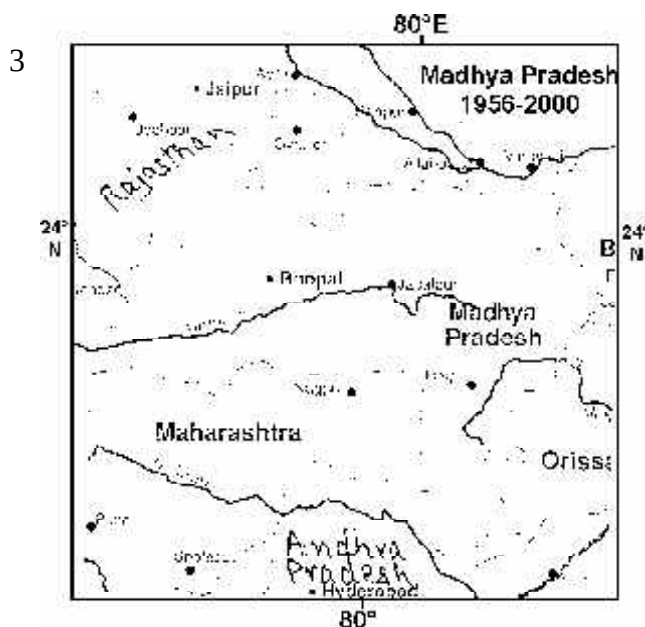
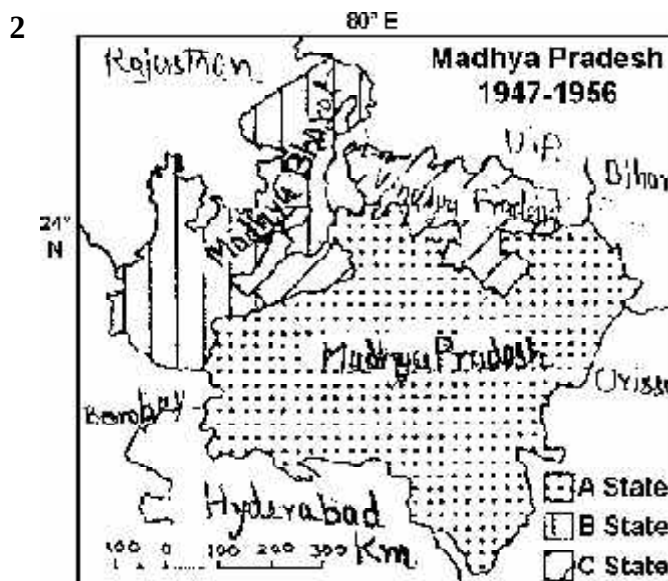
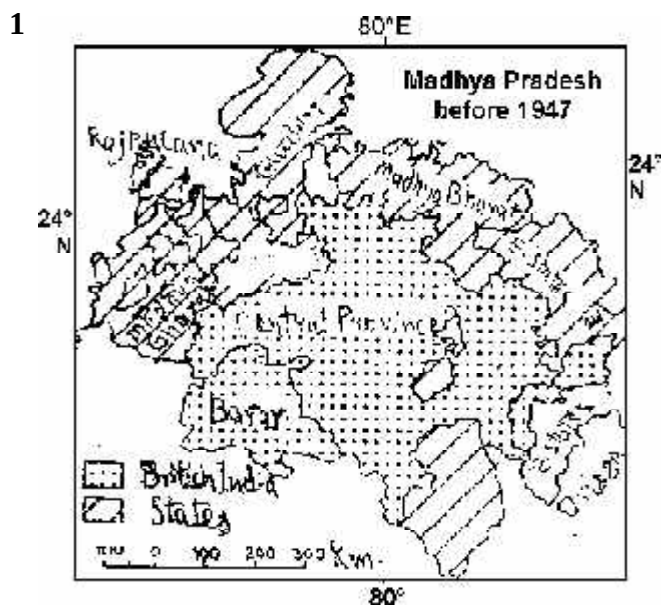
Birds of Which Madhya Pradesh?

Dr. RAJIV SAXENA, MIG-853, Darpan Colony, Thatipur, Gwalior – 474 011 [M.P.]

When we refer to old bird records of Madhya Pradesh, there remains a lot of confusion as to which region we are talking about. Central Provinces of Osmaston [1923], D'Abreu [1931] and Hewetson [1944] now form parts of present Madhya Pradesh, Chhatisgarh and Maharashtra. Berar of Wright [1942] is no

longer there. Similarly, Madhya Pradesh of Hewetson [1956] is quite different from what it is now.

For the benefit of the readers of Newsletter for Birdwatchers, I am sending four maps which depict the changes in political regions from well before Independence to present day in order to make comparisons easier.



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Use of Bird Perches for Crop Protection in Tribal Zone of Southern Rajasthan

SATISH KUMAR SHARMA, Foundation For Ecological Security 18, New Ahinsapuri, Fatehpura Udaipur-31300 I (Rajasthan)

The districts of Udaipur, Dungarpur, Banswara, Sirohi, Bhilwara and Chittorgarh are generally considered parts of southern Rajasthan, where maximum spread of Aravalli hill range is met with. The Bihl, Garosia, Kathodi and Damor are the important tribes, living in this hilly forested zone of the state. Agriculture, animal husbandry, MFP collection, wage works etc. are their main occupation. They practice traditional methods of growing crops and their protection. Erection or creation of bird perches is one of them. These perches are erected to attract diurnal and nocturnal beneficial birds like owls, owlets, drongos, rollers, chats etc. Most of the bird perches are erected amidst fields of Rabi crop. Only a few are installed in Kharif crop. There are two types of bird perches in vogue in the tribal zone, namely; 1) Man-made bird perches, and 2) Natural bird perches

Man-made Perches:

Man made bird perches are prepared from locally available material. They are mainly of two types - simple perches and elaborated perches. There are nine types of man-made perches which can be seen in the tribal zones of Rajasthan:

Simple Perches:

1. Stick Perch: Bamboo (*Dendrocalamus strictus*) culm sticks are erected here and there in the field. These bamboo sticks provide perching space to the birds. Tips of sticks are used by the birds like drongos, chats, owlets etc. for perching.
2. Pole Perch: Long bamboos and stump of branches of trees are erected amidst crop fields to attract the birds. This practice is not so much in use as compared to stick perches. Sometimes fencing posts also act as pole perch in the field.
3. Leaf rachis perch: Old fallen leaves of wild date palm (*Phoenix sylvestris*) are used for making the perch. All the leaflets, preset on the rachis are removed and leafletless, rachis are erected upside down keeping basal part upward.

Elaborate Perch:

1. Cushion Perch: To make stick perch spacious, coiled mass of leaves of *Tectona grandis*, *Butea monosperma*, *Bridelia retusa*, *Holarrhena pubescens* and *Eremopogon foveolatus* grass are kept at the upper end of each stake.
2. Skull perch: Skull of cow and other domestic animals are sometimes kept at the upper end of stick or pole perch.

3. Dung cake Perch: Instead of keeping 'leaf cushion' or skull on the tip of stick perch, sometimes a hole is made in the centre of dung cakes and they are placed horizontally at the upper ends of stick perches.
4. Shoe perch: Sometime old leather shoes are placed at the tips of sticks to prepare perching stations for the birds.
5. Cruciform or Cross perch: It is an elaborate form of stick perch. The upper end of stick perch is split before its erection in the field. Then a small piece of bamboo is inserted horizontally in the split upper end of the stick perch. Sometimes, such crosses are made by two pieces of rachies of leaves of wild date palm.
6. Baya nest perch: Often deserted nests of Baya (*Ploceus philippinus*) are kept upside down on the stakes to attract birds to the perches (Sharma and Vyas, 2002)

Natural perches:

Stilt roots are generally developed at the basal part of trunk of wild date palm. Due to the presence of stilt roots, basal part of trunk become conical in appearance. Above the conical zone, trunk looks uniform in diameter. Tribals usually cut down the trunk of palm just above the basal cone whenever needed for house making. The conical stumps, never coppice and remain as such for many years. These stumps are used as perch stations by the birds including big sized owls. Stumps of other plant species also act as bird perch.

Tribals believe in many supernatural phenomena. The *nazar* or evil eye is one of them. This is the doing of an enemy, an ill wisher; a witch or an inadvertent act of a jealous person (Joshi 1995). Tribals believe that skull and shoe perches keep away the evil-eyes from their good crops other wise it would start wilting.

Southern Aravallis are infested by seven species of nocturnal small rodents like *Tatera indica*, *Rattus rattus*, *Cremnomys cutchicus*, *Mus platythrix*, *M saxcola*, *M terricolor*, and *Bandicota bengalensis* (Prakash et al. 1995). Tribals erect bird perches commonly to attract owls to control these crop damaging nocturnal rodents. However, these perches are used by rollers, chats, drongos etc. during day time and they help in biological control of insect pests upto some extent (Sharma 1998 and 1999).

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CORRESPONDENCE

DISTRIBUTION OF PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES AMONG MAGPIE ROBINS. PRADEEP KUMAR SHARMA, Opp. Carmel Convent School, Nahan-Shimla Road, Nahan, Distt. Sirmour Himachal Pradesh - 173 001

Banethi Forest Rest House is located at a height of 1000 mtrs (App.) and is surrounded by a reasonably pure Chir pine (*Pinus roxburghii*) forest. Various birds visit this area during summer. Magpie Robin (*Copsychus saularis*) is one such summer visitor, which also breeds here. The bird is commonly found in gardens, groves and open broad-leaved forests. This bird starts appearing by April and remains till the beginning of winter. As the breeding season begins, the males are found singing from their favorite treetops or posts.

I was posted as the Range Forest Officer, Jamta, in Dist. Sirmour H.P. On a warm summer afternoon as I was relaxing in the campus of Banethi Forest Rest House I noticed an active nest in the cavity of a dried-up branch of a broad leaved tree. By rotation, many species of birds occupy this cavity for nesting. Presently, a pair of Magpie Robins had built their nest in this cavity and were raising a family. The female was seen feeding the young ones, with quick flights in search of food and returning swiftly to the nest. During the observation period that lasted an hour or so, the male visited the nest only once, while the female used to visit more frequently with food. I had a feeling that the male was not taking its responsibility of rearing the young seriously. Even as I was contemplating to brand the male as an irresponsible parent, I heard a harsh alarmed call of the male, who rushed at once towards the nest to chase away a common myna (*Acridotheres tristis*), that had arrived to usurp the nest of the magpie robins. The male magpie robin appeared on the scene with loud harsh calls and determinedly chased the intruder away, just fractions before the myna could harm the nestlings. A few moments later the female Magpie Robin also returned to the nest. It appears that there is a clear-cut distribution of duties among the Magpie Robins; males are always on protection duty, while the females are on feeding duty!

SIGHTING OF FIELDFARE (TURDUS PILARIS) IN FIROZPURA OF BANASKANTHA DISTRICT, NORTH GUJARAT, INDIA. JUSTUS JOSHUA, HIREN SONI, NISCHAL M. JOSHI AND PANKAJ N. JOSHI, Gujarat Institute of Desert Ecology, Post Box: 83, Opp. Changleshwar Temple, Mundra Road, Bhuj - Kachchh, Gujarat - 370 001

During our field survey in North Gujarat for rare and endangered plant and animal species, we spotted two thrush like birds, size of a common myna, on the floor of a degraded open scrub forest patch at the fringe of the forest near Firozpora village in Banaskantha district, on 20th April 2001.

The crown and rump were of grayish or ashy bluish colour. The wings were grayish brown with a rufous tinge. The breast was buffish white with rufous to brown spots running vertically down from the throat region. The spots were smaller near the throat, which became larger towards the flanks of the breast. It had darkish brown legs. It was evident from the colors and the breast markings that this was the Fieldfare, a Passeriformes bird belonging to Family Muscicapidae and subfamily Turdinae.

The birds were seen foraging on ground in the undulating terrain dominated by *Acacia senegal* and *A. nilotica* species with very sparse grass cover, thus showing their use of the degraded shrub forest. This species was said to be found in the fields and orchards (Ali and Ripley 1995 and Grimmett *et al.* 1999).

Earlier this species has been sighted only once in India near Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh (Ali & Ripley 1995). Our sighting near Firozpora in Banaskantha district in the northern part of Gujarat is a new record for Gujarat and the second sighting in India. Since the birds were sighted in April, it is possible that they were on their return migration. Kazmierczak and Singh (1998) and Grimmett *et al.* (1999) have reported this species as a vagrant. A systematic survey during the same period would give more insight into the bird's distribution range in India.

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DEMOISELLE CRANE AT KHEEDHA VILLAGE.
NARENDRA SINGH, B-78, Balaji Marg, Near Hanuman Vatika, Hanuman Nagar, Jaipur - 302021

It was during my posting at Phalodi in 1989-90 that I observed wild demoiselle cranes being fed by villagers at Kheechan village. I immediately reported this in Hornbill and since then Kheechan village has become a tourist spot. In the year 1936, my father was posted at Phalodi and he had then observed demoiselle cranes being fed by the people of Phalodi in the school compound. The difference between 1936 and 1989-90 was that in 1989-90 the demoiselle cranes were not being fed at the school in Phalodi but at the 'Chugga-ghar' (feeding ground) of Kheechan village, which is about 5 miles from Phalodi. This has happened due to the urbanisation of Phalodi.

In the Jan - Feb 2003 issue of NLBW, it is mentioned that there are 800 years old tamarind trees in Nallur village (Dist. Bangalore). In Mangliamas village (Dist. Ajmer), there are two eight hundred years old BAOBAB trees. As Baobab tree and tamarind tree are indigenous to Africa, could it be that tamarind trees of Nallur and Baobab trees of Mangliamas both were planted by some Arabian traveller or trader of horses or slaves in the 12th - 13th century?

GREATER FLAMINGOS SPOTTED IN HOT SUMMER IN BELLARY DISTRICT. K.S.ABDUL SAMAD, Hon. Wildlife Warden of Bellary district. 392, "ASHA", Basaveshwara Extn, Hospet-583 201 Bellary dist. Karnataka
E-Mail: samadkottur@rediffmail.com

On my routine birdwatching trips in winter, I had seen Greater Flamingos in the Tungabhadra Dam area, near Hospet in Bellary district. In December 2004, I had seen a flock of Greater Flamingos in the backwaters of T.B.Dam near Vysanakere and Danapura that is close to NH-13. I could count some 12 juveniles among the flock of sixty flamingos. Among the adults, some were tall and some were short and I presumed that the former are male and the latter female.

Generally, the flamingos preferred to remain in the middle of the vast expanse of water, during the day, on account of the constant disturbances in the banks of the reservoir, by the grazing activities of sheep and cattle and by the fishing activities. No sooner the fishermen proceeded in their direction; the flamingos were taking to wings and settling at safer distances from the fishermen. In the evenings they could be seen moving towards the shore, probing the muddy waters for crustaceans and constantly uttering self-satisfied calls.

It was a spectacular sight to see the flamingos tussling their necks together, chasing one another, wading majestically in the muddy waters and flying spectacularly in the sky, in a 'V' formation. Often the birds could not be seen in the backwaters. Perhaps they had retreated to the safer areas on account of incessant disturbances. However, the flamingos were seen until February and we presumed that they might be returning to the Greater Rann of Kachch in Gujarat, for breeding.

Later, when I discussed the matter with wildlife photographer and adventurer, Srenik Kumar N Baldota, he hinted that one could see flamingos throughout the year in the T.B.Dam area. I could not appreciate his line of reasoning, because the flamingos do not have a suitable breeding habitat here.

But to my astonishment, I saw around 20 Greater Flamingos in Kamalapura Lake near Hampi. Then I presumed that the birds could be visiting the Daroji Lake and T.B.Dam area also. Accordingly when I rushed to Daroji lake; the biggest and the oldest lake of Bellary district, to my amazement I saw more than 300 Greater Flamingos on the banks of the lake. This was in peak summer, the temperature of Bellary district was hovering between 41°C and 44°C and it was indeed unbelievable! How could these birds tolerate the searing temperature and still stay put in the tank? I have observed a striking difference between these flamingos and the flamingos that visit Bellary district in winter. While the winter visitors are moderately pink colored, the summer visitors have a paler plumage. The reason for this could be that the winter visitors get to feed a lot of prawns, algae and other seafood, on account of which they acquire the pink tinge.

Further I went to the T.B.Dam, where I saw hundreds of flamingos, actively foraging in the far away muddy backwaters with minimal movement of people. My premise is that the Greater Flamingos breed twice a year. Those that breed elsewhere between February and April could be the winter visitors to the Bellary district, and those that breed between September and November are the summer visitors to the Bellary district. I will be certainly thankful to any birdwatcher or ornithologist, who can enlighten me on this peculiar phenomenon.

SIGHTING OF BLACK-BREASTED WEAVER (*Ploceus benghalensis*) IN RAICHUR - NORTH EAST KARNATAKA
M. UMASHEKAR, Asst. Executive Engineer, KPCL, No. 89, T-V Shaktinagar - 584170 and Prof. SREEVATSAV, L.- 200, Nijlangappa colony, Raichur

40 unfinished nests in the tall reeds of Krishna River bed with ten active pairs were observed on June 20th of 2005. The site was again visited on 2nd & 6th July, 2005.

Shri K.M. Narayanswamy IFS DCF (Territorial) Raichur - has Photographed the birds and colony.

As per Dr. Salim Ali's record, the distribution is North India East to Assam (common in Himalayan Terrain) South to Gujarat, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

According to Richard Grimmett, individual sightings have been reported in Coorg Dist. of South Western Karnataka.

This is the first record from North Karnataka.

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- Pocket guide to the birds of Indian Sub-Continent Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp, Tim Inskipp.

OCCURRENCE OF FRANKLIN'S OR ALLIED OR SAVANNA NIGHTJAR (*CAPRIMULGUS AFFINIS*) IN BHUJ TALUKA, KACHCHH DISTRICT, GUJARAT, JUSTUS JOSHUA, HIREN SONI, NISCHAL M. JOSHI AND PANKAJ N. JOSHI, Gujarat Institute of Desert Ecology, Post Box: 83, Opp. Changleshwar Temple, Mundra Road, Bhuj - Kachchh, Gujarat - 370 001

Every night, we see and hear the common Indian Nightjar (*Caprimulgus asiaticus*) in the new campus of Gujarat Institute of Desert Ecology (GUIDE), on Mundara road in Bhuj, Kachchh. From mid May (2002 & 2003), we started hearing the peculiar call behind the Changleshwar temple in front of our campus. The call belonged to the Franklin's nightjar, which was very familiar to one of us (Justus Joshua), as it was one of the frequently heard nightjars while working in the Bhabhar and Therai grasslands of the Shivalik hills and outer Himalayas. Calls are very important means of identifying the nightjars, as they being nocturnal species, it is more often heard than seen.

Ali (1945) has mentioned it to be presumably resident, but uncommon. The bird is said to exist in the subcontinent from the Punjab Salt Range, Rajasthan and Gujarat eastwards (Ali and Ripley 1995). Ali (1996) stated it to be widely distributed but to occur patchily from sub-montane Himalayas to throughout the subcontinent. Grimmett *et al.* (1999) reported that the species is widespread resident, unrecorded in Sri Lanka.

This is the first record of this nightjar in Bhuj Taluka and is an additional record for Kachchh district. Since, the information on its distribution does not specify any particular location or Talukas and also in view of its rarity we consider this sighting important. Based on its frequent calling pattern and behaviour, we were expecting it to nest in this area, but unfortunately as rains were fast approaching, the fallow lands had been ploughed, forcing these birds to shift the site.

According to Ali (1945) there is no information on nesting of this species in Kachchh. The constant calling and display flights by the species gives an indication that it could be breeding in the fallow land and grass patches in forested hilly tracks of Bhuj, as our sighting falls within the breeding season between March & August as reported by Ali (1945).

This species seem to use the fallow land and barren stony country with sparse shrubs dominated by *Euphorbia nebulia* and *Prosopis Juliflora* in the adjoining areas. It has been found on scrubby hillsides and light deciduous forest and grasslands (Ali 1996, Ali and Ripley 1995) and open forest and stony areas with scrub (Grimmett *et al.* 1999).

The Common Indian or Indian Nightjar (*C. asiaticus*), and Sykes's nightjar (*C. mahrattensis*) have been breeding in Kachchh (Ali 1945 and Shri Himmatsinhji Pers.Comm). Franklin's nightjar, which is rarer than the other two, could also be breeding, thus making it a breeding ground for the three nightjar species.

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REVIEW

HANDBOOK OF INDIAN WETLAND BIRDS AND THEIR CONSERVATION. KUMAR, A., SATI, J.P., TAK, P.C., ALFRED, J.R.B. 2005; i – xxvi, 1 – 468. Published by the Director, ZSI, 234/3, AJC Bose Road, 13th Floor, Nizam Palace, Kolkata 700 020. E-mail <drarunk@sancharnet.in> Rs. 1,500, US \$ 80, L 60, (Rs 975 special Discount Price for students, birdwatchers and scholars).

Review by S. Sridhar, Publisher, Newsletter for Birdwatchers.

A brilliant Handbook on the Indian Wetland Birds and their Conservation, which was long overdue, has finally arrived. It is so readable, full of facts that one could honestly benefit from it. This is one of the most enlightening works and elegantly produced as well.

This handbook includes groups popularly known as the waterfowl, waders, shorebirds and the seabirds. In addition, a number of other birds such as kingfishers, raptors and some passerines, which are also ecologically dependent on wetlands and are known as wetland dependant and associated birds, have been termed together as wetland birds. Wetland birds are one of the best indicators of the health of a given wetland habitat.

Their first attempt to bring out a field guide on waterbirds of north India was well received by the birdwatchers. The encouragement from fellow birders further prompted the authors to venture into the present publication. We really have the best wetland bird book by any international standards.

The Handbook provides extensive information on 310 wetland bird species, including 243 waterbirds and 67 wetland dependant and associated birds listed from India. Of these 51 species are globally threatened. The Zoological Survey of India, in accordance with its aims and objectives is contributing by subsidizing the cost of the Handbook, for students, birdwatchers and scholars.

Until such a time an Indian Wetland Birds Handbook was available, we had to console ourselves with Bharat Bhushan *et al*'s 'A field guide to the waterbirds of Asia' published by the Wild Bird Society of Japan. This guide has illustrations of many similar looking birds printed on a single plate, some occurring in India and others occurring in other Asian countries with unfamiliar scientific names. A novice Indian birder was perhaps at a loss to identify the birds that arrived at a wetland near his home. The Handbook has filled up this lacuna and one can be reassured that the wetland birds found in India are described and one need not be confused with a look alike found in Malaysia, Indonesia, Russia, or Japan. For this reason, the Handbook is a noteworthy addition to the existing publications on Indian Wetland birds.

Taej Mundkur examined the draft of the Handbook critically and had given extensive comments and offered many of his unpublished observations, besides contributing the second Foreword. Throughout the project, Richard Thomas and M. J. Crosby of Birdlife International have provided support and reviewed the draft manuscript of the Handbook. Further, Mike Crosby not only provided the first Foreword but also permitted the authors to use material from BLI publications.

Taej Mundkur and Crosby have taken up proper editing, recasting and rewriting tasks to weed out the imperfections. Their persistent efforts have brought about the cogency of flow and the soundness of factual information, packed delightfully into this remarkably reliable document.

It is indeed edifying to compare the Handbook with 'A field guide to the waterbirds of Asia' brought out a decade ago. The pioneering effort by Bharat Bhushan *et al* is bettered by the authors of the Handbook, who have gone one stage further to include the conservation aspects of the endangered birds. This information-packed archival work is riveting from beginning to end. The authors have provided ample species facts, included hundreds of useful pictures and packed the book with countless distribution maps, graphs, and colourful diagrams.

In the preliminary section of the book, the authors have given notes on 'How to use the book.' The information is presented, with coloured distribution maps for each species with symbols to indicate the extent of distribution and the extent of population. An exhaustive list of terms and abbreviations used, are also provided. There are apparent signals to the authors' skills, their inventiveness and wetland bird knowledge in every other page. The Handbook describes devious ways in which a bird survives within a demanding habitat. These wetland habitats are made chronically worse and allowed to progressively succumb to man's commercial greed.

It is a delight to come across an amalgamation of the traditional knowledge which dates back to Baker's 'Fauna of British India' (1922-30) and Ali & Ripley's 'Handbook of the Birds of India & Pakistan' (1968-74) on the one hand, and the contemporary research outputs from Grimmett *et al*, (1998) Kazmierczak & ven Perlo (2000), BLI (2003) and Wetlands International (2002) on the other. Their works have been comprehensively sourced while preparing the book under review.

Under the Introductory Chapter the geological, climatic regions, rainfall pattern and temperature ranges are independently discussed with maps and presented under the subheading biogeography of India. Likewise, wetlands and their values, habitats, heronries, migration, major waterbird flyways, and watching wetland birds are also extensively dealt with one by one. Banard Lau of Malaysia has written a noteworthy communication on the digiscoping or digital photography. The main chapter is Bionomics of wetland birds, which deals with the wetland birds, wetland dependent birds and associated birds. An impressive checklist is provided in this chapter which gives common names, scientific names, conservation status, residential status, abundance status, population trend, and South Asia Population Estimates at a glance alongside their threshold numbers.

However the authors have excluded Eurasian thick-knee, coursers etc., because they are essentially the birds of the arid regions. Coursers and thick-knees ought to have been included under a separate heading 'birds from wetland dependant families, not particularly dependant on wetlands'. Since a number of bee-eaters, thrushes, babblers, and warblers have been included under 'wetland dependant and associated birds', I interpret the exclusion of coursers and thick-knees from the book as unjustifiable.

The reader gradually grasps the true nature of wetland birds of India, appreciates their life styles and marvels their voyages crisscrossing the hemispheres. All the same, the wetland birds are mindful of playing only their appointed roles in the troubled ecosystem and make the most of the untapped natural resources.

The authors discuss the status of wetland birds in yet another comprehensive chapter that deals with the residential, abundance status, conservation aspects along with 2001 IUCN criteria for red listing of threatened species. A table of IUCN red list categories and another table containing the conservation status of the 51 globally threatened species occurring in India, are also provided along side photographic plates of the globally threatened, near threatened and data deficient species. There are any number of inducements to a serious birder to get hooked to this book!

The fourth Chapter is devoted to the socio-economic issues of wetlands, wherein the definition of wetlands, direct and indirect use values of wetlands and classification of wetlands, the Ramsar definition of wetlands, and biodiversity in Indian wetlands are extensively covered. In this chapter, illustrations of different types of wetlands as per the Ramsar definition and socio-economic uses of wetlands (Stuip 2002) are depicted. They will prove exceptionally useful in creating awareness about the multiple roles of wetlands. The sub-chapter on biodiversity in Indian wetlands, deals with the vegetation and faunal diversity. Here, the common types of aquatic plants and some cultivable species of fish are also illustrated. Photographs of some 16 wetland habitats are also provided. Wetland losses, threats to waterbirds, information needs, and effects of climate change are also dealt with. The brilliance of design and the symmetry of the illustrations are comparable to any international publication. A sub-chapter on conservation deals with the Ramsar Convention's definition of "wise use of wetlands." All too often, the most straight forward facts are described with welcome visuals, for example; the illustrations of different types of wetlands as per Ramsar definition.

Fortunately, the book looks into international conventions, agreements and policies, including the CMS, Bonn, and Ramsar and thus lives up entirely to its promise in the chapter on Protected Area Network (PAs) which deals with the wetland sanctuaries and National parks, Ramsar sites, Monotrex sites, and world heritage sites. It also covers the important bird areas (IBAs) and the criteria, and Sacred wetlands. A useful table contains the list of wetlands identified under the national conservation programme; another table lists the statewise distribution of wetland PAs, Waterbird Sanctuaries, and Ramsar sites. Yet another table gives a comprehensive list of 139 Congregator IBA sites in India. This being a government document, the tables and figures can be quoted in all conservation related issues pertaining to these wetlands.

It is unfortunate that the pink headed duck disappeared, before the advent of colour photography and the publishers have tried their hands at colouring the monochrome picture, retrieved from the archives at Alfred Ezra's waterfowl collection in England. This remarkable photograph of a flock

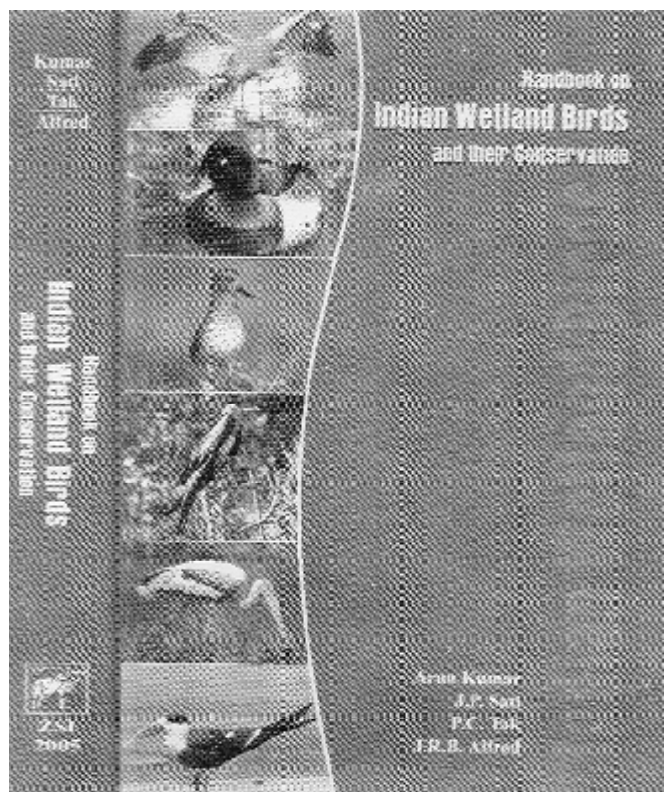
of ten pink-headed ducks, floating gently as the ripples lapped them, was possibly taken by the famous Indian Ornithologist Salim Ali himself, in November 1929.

A cursory glance at the presentation did not reveal any contradictions of body or text. The accentuation on titles and strong construction; which are seldom repeated, can be described as an incomparable merit of this work.

The last chapter deals with the Framework for conservation of wetlands, wherein National policies and laws, International conventions, agreements and policies, that include, CBD, Cites, Ramsar, Bonn, Rio, and Indo-Russian agreement are exhaustively looked into. A sub-chapter on Co-ordination of Action in the Asia region and another on the strategy for threatened wetland birds in India deal with the complex issues relating to international co-operation.

The sub-chapter on Government and Non-Government organizations examines the ongoing programme of Asian waterfowl census, coordinated by the Wetlands International, giving graphic accounts of movement of some migratory species.

While examining the causes of drastic decline of wetland bird populations, the authors point out to the insecurity haunting the birds from poachers, who can strike at will. The authors have plainly urged for ecological action and



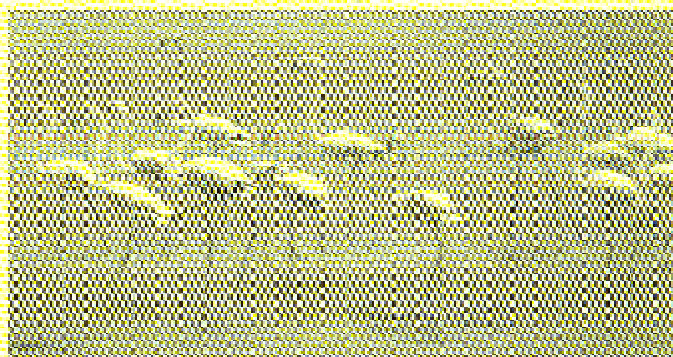
discussed case by case, the multitude of dilemmas daunting the 51 globally threatened wetland bird species in India. It is anticipated that the measures to find some relief prescriptions, will succeed in the years to come. But the painful truth is that much depends on the feedback from avid birders, who alone will be in a position to visit wetlands on a regular basis and contribute vital information needed for any conservation plan to produce results. The handbook will be a useful tool in the hands of the birders desirous of pursuing this line of inquiry, and particularly helpful in their earnest interactions with the species specialist groups. The authors have felicitously stressed that this is the ultimate roadmap for any species revival programme to succeed and portrayed the true nature of birds, so pitifully dependent on deteriorating wetland habitats.

One had expected that this book would receive a red carpet welcome from all nature lovers and conservationists in India, with as much euphoria a novel had attracted during the second week of July. Thousands of enthusiasts and booklovers stood in long queues to buy that best selling novel, braving incessant rains in major cities and towns across the globe. Even if only a fraction of nature lovers of India, had welcomed the Handbook, it would have greatly helped us to extricate ourselves from the impression that we are living in a fairy-tale world and that we have little or no time to worry about contemporary problems associated with the life giving potion - water, with birds as indicators of the health of a wetland ecosystem. The Indian wetland birds' survival is delicately poised between increasing aristocracy and the rest of us trying to prevent wetland habitats turning into septic tanks. Perhaps a limit to our knowledge of the wetland functions is contributing to the manipulations, reclamations and lopsided development of wetlands.

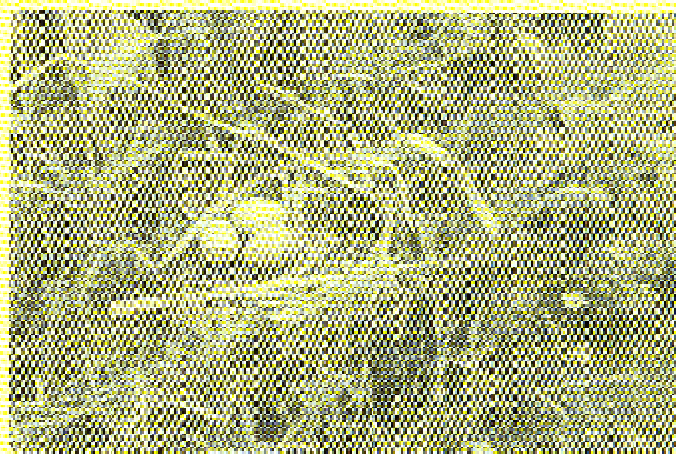
Amos Bronson Alcott had once alluded "That is a good book which is opened with expectation and closed with profit". The Handbook under review has the essential attributes that merit Alcott's axiom of a good book.

Cover: **Spot-billed Pelican** (*Pelecanus philippensis*). In the 19th century, vast colonies holding "millions of pelicans" used to exist in Myanmar, from where they have tragically disappeared. At present about 10,000 individuals are estimated in the world. BLI (2001) has identified the Spot-billed Pelican as a globally threatened/vulnerable species. In India this pelican's peril began in 1964, with the abandonment of Kolleru (Arderu-Sarapalle) colony; at that time the largest known colony in the world. Disturbances and destruction of pelican breeding colonies and reclamation of wetlands are largely attributed to their decline. Pelicans are also undergoing torment and trepidation in our country, on account of excessive hunting pressures, unregulated fishing activities and indiscriminate use of pesticides.

Photo : S. Sridhar, ARPS



Greater Flamingos in the Tungabhadra Dam area, Bellary Dt.
Photo courtesy: **Srenik Kumar N Baldota**



The Indian Moorhen's (*Gallinula chloropus*) nest
Photo: **Dr. D.N. Choudhary**

Address for Correspondence
Newsletter for Birdwatchers
No 10, Sirur Park B Street, Seshadripuram,
Bangalore 560 020, India. Tel. 080-2536 4142, 2336 4682
E-mail : <navbarat@gmail.com>

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